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# The Met Fellowship Program Newsletter

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2021



THE  
MET

# A Year of Building Resilience

A Letter from Marcie Karp

To say there are no words to describe the last twelve months is a cliché. With so much happening, events of such importance, with such frequency and such long-lasting consequences, there are actually *too many* ways to describe last year. The pandemic, the continuing quest for racial justice, the economic uncertainty, and the U.S. presidential election impacted Met fellows deeply, in both personal and professional ways. However, what is truly remarkable is how they adapted. Our previous cohort's investigations were abruptly interrupted in March, and the current cohort began their fellowships completely online. Despite these challenges, they found ways to bond with department colleagues, form interest-based, self-managed working groups, and creatively use every available institutional and local resource to further their research. No disruption great or small could prevent them from moving ahead successfully. Along the way, we all learned the fine art of building resilience.

This past fall, The Met welcomed 47 fellows from seven countries and 29 universities to take part in the 2020–21 program. This remarkable group of national and international fellows, with 16 postdoctoral and 31 predoctoral scholars, is focusing on a vast array of subjects: from Te Arawa Māori pieces in museums as a globally dispersed “collective oeuvre” to the place of sculpture in transatlantic campaigns for the abolition of slavery. Through their cross-cultural investigations and diversity of thought, these fellows reconsider the boundaries of visual discourse while bridging the visual arts and other disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, performing arts, and fine arts.

In this newsletter, we share how the fellows adapted to the sudden onset of COVID-19 and the closure of the Museum. In addition, we introduce our new Chair of Education, Heidi Holder, who shares her insights about Museum scholarship and research. Heidi and the Academic and Professional Programs team also provide thoughts on The Met's 2020 statement “Our Commitments to Anti-Racism, Diversity, and a Stronger Community” and how these commitments can further the work of the fellowship program toward a more inclusive and equitable future.

I must acknowledge the resilience of my colleagues Zamara Choudhary, William Gassaway, and Savita Monie in Academic and Professional Programs. Their dedication has kept the fellowship program running as if it has been “business as usual” during the most unusual of times. In this newsletter, you'll also see Met collection images that have resonated with each of us this past year.

With warm regards,

Marcie Karp

Senior Managing Educator  
Academic and Professional Programs  
Education

Cover:  
Wangechi Mutu (Kenyan, b. 1972), *The Seated III* (detail), 2019. Bronze, 1/2 × 33 1/2 × 44 in., 855 lb. (209.6 × 85.1 × 111.8 cm, 387.8 kg). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, Women and the Critical Eye Gifts and Janet Lee Kadesky Ruttenberg Fund, in memory of William S. Lieberman, and in celebration of the Museum's 150th Anniversary, 2020 (2020.128)

# The 2020–21 Fellows



Caitlin Meehye Beach

Kaitlin Booher

Vanessa Boschloos

Amy Butner

Raymond Carlson



Nancy Micklewright

Jason Mientkiewicz

Scott Miller

Ramey Mize

Elizabeth Cory-Pearce



Caroline Gil

Rachel Mochon

Hilary Brady Morris

Sumihiro Oki

Meseret Oldjira



Hugo C. Ikehara  
Tsukayama

Claire Ittner

H. Horatio Joyce

Marina Kliger

Bryanna Knotts



Shivani Sud

Elaine Sullivan

Althea Wair Sully  
Cole

Saskia van  
Altena

Jonathan Vernon

## The 2020–21 Fellows



Alexandra Chiriac

Miriam Chusid

Sara Kornhauser

Patricia Lagarde

Julia Lillie



Christopher Daly

Seth Estrin

Meghan Forbes

Kaelyn Garcia

Sara Garzón



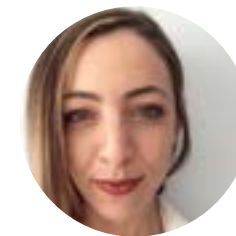
Nicole Danielle  
Pulichene

Roxanne  
Radpour

Louisa Raitt

Thea Goldring

Kristal Hale



Shweta Raghu

Alexis Romano

Caleb Simone

Jacob Stavis

Anna-Claire  
Stinebring



Courtney Wilder

Katrina  
Zacharias

# Art of Resilience

Works Selected by Academic and Professional Programs

The Aztecs called their leader *huey tlahtoani*, or “great speaker,” and he wore this golden labret in his lower lip as a visual marker of the eloquent, truthful speech expected of royalty and the nobility. Until recently, that concept never seemed so foreign to me.—William Gassaway

Unidentified Aztec artist. Serpent Labret with Articulated Tongue. Central Mexico, A.D. 1300–1521. Gold, H. 2 5/8 × W.1 3/4 × D. 2 5/8 in. (6.67 × 4.45 × 6.67 cm); wt. 1.81 oz (51.35 g). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, 2015 Benefit Fund and Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 2016 (2016.64)



## Art of Resilience



I am drawn to this endearing portrait of a blind king with his prayer beads as it shows his vulnerability, unlike the traditional images of royal power. Although it was painted in the seventeenth century in north India, the blocks of contrasting colors and simple lines give it a modern, almost abstract quality.—Savita Monie

Maharaja Sital Dev in Devotion. India (Punjab Hills, Basohli), ca. 1690. Ink, opaque watercolor, and silver on paper, image: 5 5/8 x 4 5/8 in. (14.3 x 11.7 cm), page: 7 1/4 x 6 1/4 in. (18.4 x 15.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, Cynthia Hazen Polsky Gift (2000.24)



Gazing at Parviz Tanavoli's *Poet Turning into Heech* is like gazing into a kaleidoscopic black hole. "Heech" literally means "nothing" in Persian, but "nothing" refers not to an overwhelming emptiness or loss, but to an endless array of possibilities and mysteries left unexplored. To me, this sculpture represents hope and a zest for life that I have clung onto these past months.—Zamara Choudhary

Parviz Tanavoli (Iranian, born Tehran, 1937), *Poet Turning into Heech*, 2007. Bronze, H. 89 13/16 in. (228.1 cm), W. 22 13/16 in. (57.9 cm), D. 25 1/2 in. (64.8 cm); Wt. 594 lbs. (269.4 kg). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, 2011 NoRuz at The Met Benefit, 2012 (2012.39)



This very small, beautifully painted portrait has always kept watch over me as I've walked through the European paintings galleries over the years. The figure makes me question my own actions, as he seems to be thinking deeply about all that is transpiring. The translation of the Latin quotation on the sheet of paper in the book is "Truth breeds hatred," which never resonated so clearly with me as it has in these past few months.—Marcie Karp

Hans Holbein the Younger (German, 1497/98–1543), *Hermann von Wedigh III (died 1560)*, 1532. Oil and gold on oak, 16 5/8 x 12 3/4 in. (42.2 x 32.4 cm), with added strip of 1/2 in. (1.3 cm) at bottom. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Bequest of Edward S. Harkness, 1940 (50.135.4)

# Research in the Time of COVID-19

**Emily M. K. Müller**

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Conservation Fellow, Paper Conservation

When I was sent home from the Museum on March 13, 2020, I didn't realize it was the last physical day of my two-year fellowship in Paper Conservation. It was a blessing that we as conservators—constantly thinking ahead—had already carefully prepared ourselves for an eventual lockdown. As a result, I was able to continue my research project at home, which included testing a cutting machine, the Silhouette Cameo 4. The idea was to digitally process dimensions from a photo and let the cutting machine produce precise fills. These fills could compensate for losses in future treatments: for example, filling gaps in insect-damaged Hindu devotional prints in The Met collection.

In the beginning, I realized that working without the top-notch equipment and materials in the lab was just one of the many limitations I would face in my research. While trying to work around these shortcuts, kitchen equipment and my roommate's shelving created a fully functional photographic documentation set-up in my bedroom. In order to discuss in-depth procedures, I regularly connected and collaborated with my colleagues virtually. After dealing with the practical work, I faced the theoretical part of the research, which included bibliographic sources and discussions with my supervisor and curators, all of which distilled into a presentation.

Coming from a practical conservation background, it was a major personal adjustment



to lower my expectations and efficiency and accept that actual conservation treatment would not be an option at all. However, this challenge inspired new and creative approaches I didn't expect. After these months as a fellow at home, I'm surprised at how much I was able to finish on my own. Without the support of my colleagues, however, this extraordinary chapter of my research and life would not have been possible.

Troubleshooting with the cutting machine at home. Image provided by Emily M. K. Müller

## Research in the Time of COVID-19

**Horatio Joyce**

Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Research/Collections Specialist, Drawings and Prints

My department, Drawing and Prints, closed several days before the rest of the Museum because of a suspected case. My roommate had already left the city by that point, so I was able to work at the kitchen table. The apartment is small, and I'm not sure how we would've handled the situation had he stayed. I tried tackling my spring colloquium paper from home because it was coming up later that month. Then the Museum closed, and the colloquia were canceled soon after that. I decided to put the research on pause, taking the time to carefully organize the Dropbox folders. Outside, it felt like civilization was beginning to unravel, but at least my Dropbox was under control. On March 16, the city started shutting down and the rest of my routine fell apart.

I packed up some clothes and most of my books and headed to Providence to shelter with my parents. They gave me two attic bedrooms they'd been renting to college students, and I turned one of them into a study, setting up a long table my dad uses for DIY projects. I was extremely fortunate. I worked with my supervisor on a grant application for an exhibition and looked for opportunities to further my thinking about my research at The Met. Over the summer I presented a symposium paper exploring the incredible range of material in the archival records of the American architect Alexander Jackson Davis (1803–92) and how this extraordinary holding might be used to reinterpret the architect and his work from the perspective of 2020.

By mid-July, I'd relocated to the U.K. It'd been announced that Met fellows wouldn't be back



on site until January 2021, and my partner, who's British, wasn't able to get the visa he needed to start his postdoc in New York. Moving, traveling (plus quarantining), and finding a place to live during the pandemic was stressful and scary—and it obviously affected my work. On the upside, the time I did manage to put aside for writing tended to be rewarding. And it was more than worth it to be back with my partner. As of November 2020, we are in "Lockdown 2" in London, but new collaborations with British colleagues and the tentatively positive news about the vaccine has helped me take it one step at a time and stay focused on writing.

Architectural drawings for research. Image provided by Horatio Joyce

# Postcard from Peru

**Arabel L. Fernández**

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Conservation  
Fellow, Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas

On March 12, 2020, the Museum's Education Department announced that all activities at The Met would stop the next day at noon. The COVID-19 virus began to spread rapidly in the U.S., and the biosecurity measures established by the Museum prevented fellows from returning to work. We had time to make copies from our computers, since nobody knew how long the shutdown would take. At that moment, I took the situation calmly, and I thought that in two weeks we would return and continue with our activities and projects. I was working on two projects: one was the repacking of a group of African textiles, and the other was working with *dodot alas alasan*, ceremonial textiles from Indonesia.

I couldn't help hearing the news from around the world that the virus was killing hundreds of people, and thousands more had contracted it. I am from Peru, and my family lives there. I was very afraid of what might happen to them. We tried to stay connected through WhatsApp. I also received emotional support from Museum staff—Marcie Karp, Christine Giuntini (my supervisor), Joanne Pillsbury, William Gassaway, Zamara Choudhary, Matt Noiseux, Emilia Cortes—and my friends in the U.S., Daniel Rifkin and Becky Chambers. I am incredibly grateful to all of them.

During my fellowship I stayed in New Jersey, and the local authorities declared a quarantine just as other states did. I went outside only to buy essential meals and a few necessities. My outfit incorporated a new accessory: a mask, which I made myself. To get to the supermarket, I walked about twenty minutes through empty streets

brought to life by the colors of the spring season. Seeing the blossoms open made me feel glad. There is life all around us!

The pandemic represented an unexpected and challenging moment. It was difficult to be calm and positive in that uncertainty. I reminded myself that there were many things I had to do, such as preparing my presentation and writing online descriptions of Andean textiles from the collection. I alternated between working and taking online courses, attending conferences, and drawing textile motifs. I reproduced them in weaving, using *tritik* resist dye, an Indonesian decorative technique used in *dodots*.

Throughout this arduous process, I learned to be resilient. We have to focus on the present and give it our best.

Ceremonial Textile (*Dodot bangun tulak alas alasan*). Indonesia, 19th–early 20th century. Cotton, adhesive, gold leaf, H. 84 x L. 156 in. (213.4 x 396.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, The Fred and Rita Richman Foundation Gift, and funds from various donors, 2007 (2007.251)

Postcard from Peru



# Three Questions for Heidi Holder

Frederick P. and Sandra P. Rose Chair of Education



## What kinds of fellowships and research are useful and relevant to an art museum in today's context?

I've been thinking a lot about this. Art museums with collections that span many cultures across long time periods are, by their nature, interdisciplinary institutions. The contemporary context demands that museums be self-reflexive on issues of equity and inclusion and their role in society. Interdisciplinary research and fellowships—multidimensional projects that combine several branches of learning—help facilitate this self-reflexive process. These programs can be avenues to critique established ideas, pose new questions, generate new answers to old questions, and, over time, shift fields of study, eventually shifting the role of museums to be more responsive to an ever-changing society.

Recently the International Council of Museums (ICOM) proposed updating their definition of the museum to reflect that museums “are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing.” Some countries opposed this new definition as too “ideological,” saying it doesn't distinguish a museum with collections from a cultural center, library, or laboratory. What are your thoughts on this debate, and how do you see the change in definition affecting museums in the U.S. and around the world?

I remember the fanfare over the definition. The fact that there is a debate signals that U.S. and European museums are rethinking the role of museums, many created years ago, in contemporary society. The debate also signals indecision about the direction museums should take as they engage with their publics, as they continue into the twenty-first century. The proposed definition itself, particularly as it originated from ICOM, is a first step in transforming museums into just, participatory, diverse spaces, as it encourages discourse within the sector—discourse that will eventually lead to action no matter how small. It's a start.

The change in the definition will start a necessary discussion and may lead some museums to adopt the approaches and practices ICOM suggests. Those institutions that are not so moved by ICOM's lexical act will eventually be moved by audiences. Audiences are impermanent. They change

Heidi Holder

as populations move, as economies shift, and as the public's palate for art and cultural experiences expands or contracts. Either through intention or by necessity, museums will adapt to the changing social and cultural milieu around them or become irrelevant.

## What are you excited about contributing to and transforming at The Met?

The Met is an education institution that is shaping a future made up of an inclusive, rewarding workplace, interdisciplinary and diverse fellowships, innovative and relevant exhibitions, and engaged local and global communities who feel welcome in our space or the spaces The Met facilitates in the communities outside its doors. All this excites me. More than that, I work with a world-class team in Education and across the Museum. The team. The Met's goals. Those two sweet spots coming together will make my journey here rewarding and enjoyable!

# Virtual in 2021— Spring Fellows Colloquia

We are excited to open the 2021 Spring Fellows Colloquia to a larger audience that can participate remotely. We hope you enjoy this unique opportunity to join us for a virtual look into our current fellows' research. [Learn more here.](#)

## April 15

Tensions and Transferences: Photography, Fashion, and the Quotidian

## April 16

Staging the Avant-Garde: Performative Practices in Central and Eastern Europe

## April 22

Recentering the Local: Artistic Agency in the Context of Circulation and Exchange

## April 23

Sound and Witness: Oral/Aural Histories and Materiality

## April 29

Remembrance and the Human Form in the Ancient and Premodern World

## April 30

Art and Identity: Between Self and Other, 1500–1900

## May 6

Breaking Our Contemporary Filter: Reimagining Art Histories across Three Continents

## May 7

Economies of Vision: Art Labor, Art Markets, and Cultural Production after 1940

## May 13

Multivalent Materialities: Objects as Instruments of Cultural Exchange, 1500–Present

## May 14

Artistic Partnerships, Real and Imagined: Netherlandish Art beyond Geographic Boundaries

## May 20

Connections and Assemblages in the Ancient Mediterranean: Three Objects Revisited

## May 21

Unraveling the Shape of Man: Preserving Structure and Integrity

## May 27

Micro to Macro: Advancing New Technologies and Protocols to Visualize and Conserve Artworks



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# Opinion—Toward a More Inclusive and Equitable Fellowship Program

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**Heidi Holder,**  
Frederick P. and Sandra P. Rose Chair of  
Education, and  
Academic and Professional Programs

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Calls to diversify American art museums—which, according to studies by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, have predominantly white staff, especially in the curatorial, conservation, and leadership spheres—have been building for decades. Last June, recognizing the magnitude and urgency of the problem, The Met released 13 commitments to diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA). One of the commitments is to reframe the fellowship program to reflect goals for DEIA.

In the past, The Met Fellowship Program has hosted very few graduates from Historically Black Colleges and Universities and fewer fellows from state schools than from elite, private universities. The Met Fellowship Program and others like it are direct pipelines into the museum field, with former fellows filling leadership positions and curatorial, conservation, scientific, and education roles. The Met needs fellows with diverse backgrounds and perspectives so that future Museum professionals can share their unique voices, provide new perspectives on collections, and highlight narratives that have mostly been missing from art historical discourse.

In early December, we held a museum-wide workshop to look critically at The Met Fellowship Program. The two main goals were to better understand the obstacles that may prevent people from BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) communities from becoming Met fellows and to begin the process of shaping a fellowship program that is inclusive and equitable. The questions that framed the workshop were:

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## Opinion

- How do we create equity in selecting candidates? What are the criteria used to evaluate fellowship applications, and can we broaden them?
- How can we enhance the experience of Met fellows? How do we perceive knowledge, and what do we need in order to accept that one is knowledgeable? Is a PhD or advanced degree the only signal of knowledge, or are there other signals?
- How are we supporting our fellows, and what do they need to be successful in their careers during and after the program?

To help the Museum better understand factors that might impede participation of BIPOC candidates and to facilitate a critical reshaping of the current fellowship program, we invited three speakers who work directly with underrepresented groups in the fields of education, conservation science, and object-based research fellowships. Each speaker—an expert on equitable and inclusive admission practices, a current BIPOC fellow, and a leader of a successful, equitable, and inclusive fellowship program—presented a valuable perspective on the fellowship experience, from admission to completion.

We heard candid details about the challenges of attracting and retaining BIPOC students and scholars and supporting them to pursue and complete advanced degrees. These challenges range from familial pressures to poor awareness of career options in the art and cultural sector. On

a professional level, many BIPOC staff, fellows, and students have felt that they did not belong in cultural institutions and often experienced culture shock because of the lack of representation. BIPOC fellows have often faced both microaggressions and outright racism in these environments. In addition, many BIPOC fellows pursue interests and fields of study that do not fit neatly into museum departments, which are often based on traditional, Eurocentric formations of art history.

In response to these honest conversations, small working groups gathered and proposed several actionable recommendations to the larger group. At the end of the workshop, participants acknowledged that the efforts must be ongoing and persistent in order to have real impact.

While seeking to reach out to underrepresented groups, we must remain vigilantly aware that The Met is a predominantly white institution (PWI). “PWI” is an important categorization because it is these institutions that control the power structures, deciding who is included, whose voices matter, and which narratives are worthy of sharing both locally and broadly. We are responsible for making sure that our fellowship program selection process is equitable, that fellows have meaningful experiences in an inclusive environment, and that fellows have the support and mentorship they need to forge a successful career in the museum field. All these duties require critical introspection, dialogue, dedication, and hard work from all of us at The Met. We intend to pursue these goals with passion so that our fellowship program becomes a catalyst for a more inclusive and equitable museum field.

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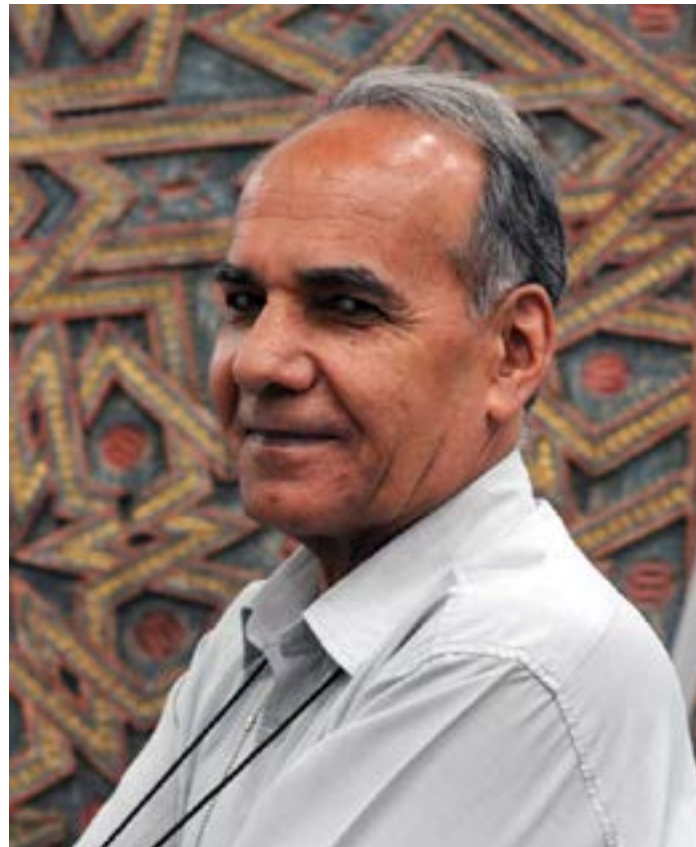
# In Memoriam

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## **Abdullah Ghouhani (1948–2020), Research Scholar in Islamic Art**

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The Museum lost a dear and respected colleague, Abdullah Ghouhani, on August 6, 2020. A longtime research scholar in the Department of Islamic Art, he was involved in many important Museum projects as an epigrapher and author. His understanding of texts in Persian and Arabic and his vast knowledge of literary material made him an invaluable resource. Dr. Ghouhani was an important link between The Met and Iran, allowing the Museum to maintain conversations and exchanges between the two worlds despite the many geopolitical obstacles. He worked on many forms of artistic media: manuscripts, ceramics, metalwork, arms, and textiles. Anything with an inscription was a challenge that he welcomed. The Museum will miss him tremendously, as will generations of curators, fellows, students, scholars, and others who have benefited from his immense knowledge.



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# Acknowledgements

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Mercedes T. Bass, Bothmer Fellowship Fund, Sylvan C. Coleman and Pam Coleman Memorial Fund, Chester Dale Fellowship Fund, Douglass Foundation, Sherman Fairchild Foundation, The Getty Foundation, The Hagop Kevorkian Fund, Leonard A. Lauder and Anonymous Gifts to The Leonard A. Lauder Research Center for Modern Art, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, J. Clawson Mills Charitable Trust, Gerald and May Ellen Ritter Scholarship Fund, Theodore Rousseau Fellowship Fund, Joseph and Sylvia Slifka Foundation, Hanns Swarzenski and Brigitte Horney Swarzenski Fellowship Fund, Eugene V. and Clare E. Thaw Charitable Trust, Marica and Jan Vilcek, Polaire Weissman Fund, and Jane and Morgan Whitney Fellowship Fund.

### **Stay in touch!**

Contact us with your updated email address, position, or affiliation at [academic.programs@metmuseum.org](mailto:academic.programs@metmuseum.org).

The Met Fellows' LinkedIn group can be found at [linkedin.com/groups/8113779](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8113779).

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**The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art**

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